

Qualitative Research Regarding Vacation Decision Making and Perceptions of the Minnesota Resort Experience

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Summary

In December, 2009, The University of Minnesota Tourism Center conducted 4 focus groups which resulted in qualitative data related to the vacation decision making process and the perception of Minnesota resorts. A total of 54 people participated in the groups—two groups made up of people who had previous experience with a Minnesota resort and two groups that did not.

The general results of the focus groups include:

- With one exception, there were no major differences between those with Minnesota resort experience and those without relating to the process of making vacation decisions. The exception: children of families that have a history of vacationing at Minnesota resorts tend to request a resort stay.
- All groups utilize a variety of online research and vacation booking tools in addition to traditional travel information outlets
- Pricing and package deals are increasingly important factors in decision making
- All groups had similar perceptions of resorts but those with resort experience are more concerned about resorts maintaining a sense of “nature” while those without resort experience are more concerned about “amenities”
- All groups had the perception that Minnesota resorts need to be booked further in advance (6-12 months) than other lodging types
- All groups expressed the view that resorts will continue to consolidate and grow larger in the future but will remain part of the travel scene and may prosper due to economic conditions and social preferences for travel closer to home

Background

In August, 2009, Explore Minnesota Tourism brought several resort owners/managers together for a discussion of the current status of Minnesota resorts, information needs,

and steps that could be taken to assist the resort industry develop a clearer picture of the changing market. Those involved in the discussion included: Dutch Cragun, Mark Ludlow, Mark Novotny, Tom Osell, Chris Ruttger, Bob Ryan, Ron Rykken, as well as John Edman and Colleen Tollefson from Explore Minnesota Tourism and Kent Gustafson, University of Minnesota Tourism Center.

Several information gathering strategies were discussed, with focus groups being one. The Tourism Center committed to developing and conducting the focus groups with input on questions from the resort owners/managers.

Methodology

The Tourism Center contracted with C.J. Olson, a market research firm, to recruit and screen potential focus group participants. The screening tool is attached in Appendix 1. From the total list, a group of four groups were assembled. The general description of the groups is attached in Appendix 2. A set of questions, based upon the input from resort owners, was developed and used with each group. The same set of questions was asked. However, based upon the discussion, a variety of follow-up questions further probed the reactions of participants. A copy of the focus group questions is attached in Appendix 3.

Findings

The following represents the major findings of all of the focus group discussions as well as quotes from the participants to illustrate the findings. Additional observations and suggestions are included at the end of the report

Q1 Who initiates the vacation discussion? Who makes travel decisions?

- Findings
 1. Usually, one individual family member (it can be man or woman) takes the initiative to start a vacation discussion
 2. Discussion includes family preferences, shopping for “deals”, conversation with friends, as well as looking for information in travel publications
 3. Major vacation parameters are time and money

4. While personal networks were mentioned as an important information tool, only a few participants are using social media (Facebook/Twitter) and it does not appear to be a major information tool at this time
 5. When social media is used, it appears to be used once the travel destination has been reached and when looking for “inside tips” about special attractions like restaurants or lodging
 6. There was no consensus among participants as to whether the best travel deals were available on the internet or using a travel agent
 7. No significant gender differences between the groups surfaced as to who initiates the vacation discussion
 8. Some decisions are based upon family gatherings: weddings, reunions, etc (central location preferred)
 9. Most direct contact from travel marketers is via e-mail or direct mail
 10. Personal feelings often come into play (eg. need for adventure; stress relief)
 11. Grandparents are including grand children in vacation destination discussions
 12. Women may tend to initiate discussions more than men but there is no significant difference in gender
 13. Often, whichever adult family member feels the “most stress” and wants to get away initiates vacation discussion
- Key quotes
 1. “We find a deal and build on that”
 2. “I like quiet places so my vacation ideas start there”
 3. “When I start feeling restless, I start thinking about a vacation”
 4. “When I see the first snowflake, I am looking for deals to Arizona just to get out of the cold”
 5. “We have some long time travel goals” (to see all US states)
 6. “We shop around. Of course, the kids want to go every week but our vacations depend upon finances and availability of family members”
 7. “We look for adventure vacations. It keeps us young”

8. "Have money, will travel"
9. "You snooze, you lose" (taking advantage of travel deals)

Q2. If there are children or other family members, what role do they play in decisions?

- Findings
 1. Children play a part in the discussion by suggesting things they like to do: the older the child, the more involvement they have (Parents plan educational/entertainment trips with kids involvement)
 2. Kids have more influence on local travel locations and local sports travel
 3. Kids are participating in the search for travel destinations via internet
 4. Lodging destinations with water parks, free breakfasts, and other activities are popular with families
 5. Kids are looking at the specific activities they will be able to participate in at a destination
 6. Parents and grandparents are involving kids more: short term (more entertainment); long term (educational)
- Quotes
 1. "We want to make sure the destinations we choose are kid friendly. Las Vegas is definitely not kid friendly"
 2. "We wanted to make sure our kids had a classic 'up North' Minnesota resort experience"
 3. "Having a free breakfast is great when you are traveling with kids"
 4. "Going to the resort was always a tradition in our family every summer. I have some great memories when I was a kid"
 5. "We are going here—want to come along?" (Grandparent to older grandchild)
 6. "Small resorts have more things for kids to do—they know where everything is"

7. "We like to take the kids on road trips to see "the biggest" or the "strangest whatever"
8. "Vacation site depends upon the level of activity we all agree on"

Q3. What information tools or resources do you use to make travel decisions?

- Findings
 1. Almost all individuals in all groups use Web search engines and travel web sites. Major search sites participants mentioned include:
 - Google (most frequently mentioned) and Google Earth
 - Travelocity
 - Hot wire
 - Vacationstogo.com
 - Bing (judged by one participant as the most thorough)
 - Expedia
 - Tripadvisor.com
 - Cruisecritic.com
 2. Traditional sources of information were also mentioned by all groups. They include:
 - AAA (Guide books, triptiks, and travel agents)
 - Travel magazines (Conde Nast; AAA; special interest)
 - Newspapers (Sunday travel sections: have prompted calls to resorts for further information and brochures)
 - Sports and travel shows
 - Tourist bureaus at destination cities
 - Libraries
 - Travel brokers

3. Personal networks are important—recommendations from family and friends that have already experienced a destination; friends in the travel industry also give recommendations
 4. Business conferences
 5. For trips inside Minnesota, people tend to research individual community or attraction websites
 6. Minnesota parks and campgrounds are popular places for destinations within Minnesota
 7. Good deals include attraction tickets and car rental discounts
 8. There are more day trips and short trips due to work schedules, kids schedules(day off
 9. Very few use exploreminnesota.com but those that do have found it helpful
 10. Several participants from both groups mentioned the importance of web site reviews without any reservations about whether the reviews were honest or not
 11. While personal networks were mentioned as an important information tool, only a few participants are using social media (Facebook) and it does not appear to be an major information tool at this time
 12. Social media appears to used once the travel destination has been reached and when people are looking for “inside tips” about special attractions like restaurants or lodging
 13. There was no consensus among participants as to whether the best travel deals were available on the internet or by using a travel agent
- Quotes
 1. “I look at web site reviews very seriously when I am considering a location”
 2. “You just need to type in where you want to go and all the information you need is at your fingertips”
 3. “There are a lot of places to go in Minnesota if you know where to look”
 4. “I like to find out what’s going on in the town where my business meeting is at that time”

5. "Price is a big thing, and the internet seems to have the best deals"
6. "I want to find out what's most economical as well as what's going on to make it a learning experience"
7. "Travel in Minnesota is not an extravagant magical epic"

Q4. How much time is allowed for booking decisions?

- Findings
 1. The amount of lead time depends upon the length and complexity of the trip (21 days to 2-6 months unless it's a package deal)
 2. Cruises—1 year lead time in order to get trip paid for in advance
 3. Online ticket price searches mean shorter planning horizons
 4. There is a preference for booking via telephone for Minnesota accommodations
 5. For most localized trips—participants book over the phone (want to get the details: number of cabins, amenities, restrictions, extra deals, etc)
 6. The major advantages of online searches: speed, related search sites
 7. AAA (both online and in-person) still used extensively for special situations (eg. kids flying solo across country)
 8. Some establish a separate credit card to pay for travel
 9. In some cases, where travel is booked through a search engine like priceline.com, there isn't a great deal of time to prepare—price is accepted and the trip is booked
 10. There are differences of opinion whether to book an all inclusive or ala carte vacation
- Quotes
 1. "It's just all right there" (booking online)
 2. "It's reassuring to talk to a real person when making reservations"

3. "I book online but I always call to confirm, just so I know for sure"
4. "It's so much easier to book online"
5. "I like working with a travel agent because its tangible information"
6. "I get tired of being kept on hold when I try to book over the phone"
7. "I get nervous planning a vacation without speaking to a real person"
8. "When driving we take our RV—it's like a living room on wheels"

Q5. Perhaps you have taken your planned vacation for the season. However, something else comes up that encourages you to travel. What might the "something else" be?

- Findings
 1. Most agree that family and friends as well as sporting activities influence other trips
 2. Other trip motivators include: leisure side trips associated with planned business trips; festivals or special events; Fall colors; and some "unique" event
 3. The importance of "finding a good deal" was a consistent finding among all groups
 4. There is a combination of business and leisure travel
 5. Special events or "something unique" may trigger travel (hot air balloons/blue grass music)
- Quotes
 1. :When kids start driving us crazy we start looking for a trip"
 2. "Experience nature"
 3. "When the offer is so good we can't refuse it"
 4. "I've done a lot of cruises, so I look for the newest one"
 5. "If it's not a deal, we don't do an extra trip"

6. “Even if I had the money, I would look for a deal”

Q6. What factors determine the type of lodging you choose while on vacation?

- Findings
 1. The broad criteria for making choices includes: reliability; comfort; in-room appliances; customer service; safety & security quietness; cleanliness; in room appliances (sleep number beds availability of room upgrade; options as well as access to activities, (applies to all types of lodging)
 2. Virtual tours of property to see what they are like are important
 3. Price/location important for families as well as swimming pool, restaurant, gift shop
 4. Importance of online reviews is growing
 5. Lodging with free breakfast is important to families traveling with kids
 6. People want to know something about the place before they reserve a room
 7. Access is important (other activities/restaurants/kids activities/close to lake)
 8. Other incentives: continental breakfast, cocktail hour (Embassy Suites), free meal, 1 night free stay, package of lodging and skiing), Rewards points (Marriott) swimming pool attraction coupons
- Quotes
 1. “If the establishment has been in business for 50 years, I figure they must be doing something right”
 2. “It’s just where you sleep. I would rather spend more money on activities and experiences than lodging”
 3. “We like inclusive package—know exactly what costs are”
 4. “A B & B gives a flavor of the history and culture of the area
 5. “If it was good enough for George Washington to sleep in, it was good enough for me” (Historic Inn)
 6. “I picked the resort that just felt the best” (Lutsen)

7. “You need to book a Minnesota resort 6 months in advance and then, I just know it’s going to rain”

Q7. One of the common characteristics of this focus group is that you all have/have not had previous experience at a Minnesota resort. How would you describe your experience or your perceptions of that experience?

- Findings
 1. Consensus definition of “Minnesota resort”: cabins by the lake/close to the beach/amenities/things to do/activities on site/concierge service/on the water/golf/fishing on a lake
 2. Minnesota travel: love of nature—outside activities (hiking/swimming/skiing/golf)
 3. Importance of nature and nature experience—many resort areas need develop a quality nature experience
 4. There was mixed messages regarding the receipt of marketing messages
 - Almost all receive e-mail:—always current information
 - Many continued to prefer regular mail (photos)
 - Problem: once signed up for e-mail, participants receive a “barrage of messages
- Quotes
 1. “There is a small town mentality about Minnesota resorts” (people share information and experiences)
 - 2 “Provide more of a nature experience. Many Minnesota lakes to built up with no natural shoreline—the resort could be sitting in Minneapolis”
 - 3 “The resort was a hidden gem”
 - 4 “We have wonderful memories of the times spent at the cabin—best times of their (kids) lives”
 5. “Resorts mean different things to different people”
 6. “The resort was an opportunity to get away from concrete and traffic”

7. "I can't imagine spending \$300 per day at a Minnesota resort"
8. "They cater to families"
9. "Most resorts are for fishing---not my favorite activity"
10. "If we can't swim, it's not a resort"
11. "A resort spa is a way to spoil myself"
12. "One week just to enjoy the woods and do nothing"
13. "Most resorts don't have a sense of area history"

Q8. What do you consider the barriers for taking a resort vacation?

- Findings
 1. Price and available amount of time were the two most often mentioned barriers
 2. Distance
 3. Time of the year
 4. Scheduling (kids activities)
 5. Minnesota weather
 6. Need to book 6-12 months in advance (Exception: Lutsen: 3 weeks)
 7. Road construction
 8. Other areas advertise more (South Dakota/SE Minnesota)
 9. Weekend getaways used more now: Itasca Park/Detroit Lakes/Turtle Lake/SE Minnesota
 10. Resorts don't offer pet accommodation option
- Quotes
 1. "It's still Minnesota"
 2. "Minnesota weather is a major handicap"

3. "The Minnesota summer vacation is mystical for someone that grew up on the East Coast. I joined the cabin cult"
4. "It is easier to book during the shoulder season"
5. "Grass is always greener in another location"
6. "Minnesota will always be there I can always take a Minnesota vacation"
7. "I don't know much about northern Minnesota except for Duluth"
8. "Minnesota resorts don't do enough advertising"
9. "The Rochester area is just a vague area to me—I don't know what's there besides the Mayo Clinic"
10. "Flexibility regarding length of stay (currently only book 1 week at a time) is critical for resorts"
11. "The current length of stay drives us away"
12. "The need central location to find available resorts and pricing. We need to know what we are paying for"
13. "They (resorts) tend to add little things to the cost"
14. "Staying at a Minnesota resort would not feel like travel"—doesn't seem very far away"
15. "I like to be out of my element when I travel—Minnesota doesn't do it for me"

Q8. What do you think the future of Minnesota resorts and resort vacations will be in the next 5-10 years?

- Findings
 1. They will be bigger with more activities and amenities
 2. There will be resorts but not as many
 3. Perhaps there will be more renting to extended families
 4. Big resorts will get bigger
 5. Water parks will still be popular

6. More amenities will be added
 7. More camping sites will be available
 8. Most resorts will be larger, some very small, but nothing in-between
 9. Most small resorts will be out of business
 10. Will need to adjust to older customer base to survive
 11. Will need to add amenities that public is used to having (flat screen tvs/computer access, etc)
 12. Business will focus on extended families
 13. People will continue to look for deals
 14. Will be harder for people to experience nature (make a "nature" package)
 15. More bus tours—fall color viewing
 16. Big name entertainment—like casinos
 17. More all inclusive resorts
 18. There is an opportunity for Minnesota: "find things closer to home" get away
 19. More weekend getaways—not enough time for full vacation
 20. More environmentally friendly
 21. Minnesota resorts are a good value and are close to state parks
 22. There will be more vacation home rentals
 23. Need to have more flexibility (2-3 night stays)
- Quotes
 1. "People more likely to stay put"
 2. "Preservation of nature feel"
 3. "large resorts feel like suburban development"
 4. "Resorts need to band together to publicize availability"
 5. "Place to be together as family but separate also"

6. "Resort is a large amount of money"
7. "Cheaper to go to northern Minnesota than northern California"
8. "Resorts need to do more than boat rides and shuffle boards" (nature experiences)
9. "We booked a 3 day stay at a resort and they couldn't have been more accommodating"
10. "No more 'Dirty Dancing' type of vacations (book for all summer)"
11. "Resorts will need to adapt or go out of business"

Q9. How has the current recession impacted your travel/vacation plans over the past 2 years?

- Findings
 1. More travel in Minnesota is planned
 2. Deals and discounts rule
 3. More forced to do additional checking of sources they may not have looked before (Craig's List, travel sites)
 4. There is continuing concern over gas prices
 5. More retirement travelers—fixed incomes
 6. Do more locally in one place
 7. Less likely to take big vacation right now
 8. College expenses—not enough money to travel
- Quotes
 1. "It has wiped out our vacation plans this year"
 2. "I am working harder to afford my vacation"
 3. "Takes more time to look for things in Minnesota"
 4. "We are more likely to stay put and keep looking for deals"

Q10. Are there any other comments you would like to make about your vacation plans or Minnesota resorts?

- Findings
 1. College students also looking for deals for Spring Break
 2. Traditional winter activities(snowmobiling; ice fishing) still popular and draw people to resorts
 3. People will rent boats but not to go fishing
 4. Youth hostels are gaining popularity
 5. Older people still want to go to resorts: need cushions to make more comforts
- Quotes
 1. “ What resort owner wants a bunch of college students”
 2. “Quality of food is very important”

In addition to the above questions, resort owners that requested the focus group research suggested a number of questions related to the nature and quality of the lodging experience. There were too many questions related to this interest to include in the discussion. Therefore, a short, written survey was given to each focus group participant. They completed the survey during the focus group discussion. The results of the survey are included in Appendix 4.

Observations

- Those with previous family experiences at a Minnesota resort:
 - Are more likely to consider a resort again
 - Are more likely to have children who have had a resort vacation experience. The children are more likely to suggest going back to a resort
- Individuals with Minnesota resort experience appear to be a bit more knowledgeable of Minnesota travel websites (EMT; DNR) and localized travel information

- Individuals are more likely to go to Google first and then try other sources of information
- Hobbit Travel was mentioned several times as the preferred source of information for budget travel. The loss of Hobbit Travel has taken an important planning tool away from several of the participants
- There were differences of opinion as to whether booking online or over the phone leads to best price
- Those with Minnesota resort experience generally believe resort bookings need to be made 6 months to 12 months in advance
- More airline flights booked online—lodging tends to be booked over the phone
- No differences between groups related to the influence of children
- Because of the internet, kids may have increasing knowledge of travel choices and destinations under consideration for family vacations by parents and grandparents
- Because of their interest and involvement in sports, more kids may be influencing local travel experiences by their participation and their friends' participation in school or club sports
- Children are doing more internet research on travel destinations
- Offering a “Free Night” is a good incentive but not many people can't take advantage of it because it doesn't mesh with their travel plans
- People do respond to incentives to stay at a particular establishment. They do not have to be big incentives
- There was a consensus that resorts need to be booked far in advance
- Those with no experience in Minnesota resort are more likely to book a resort for family reunion or other extended family get together than for own vacation
- All want modern amenities in the resort lodging but there is a difference of opinion as to what constitutes “modern” (coffee makers and refrigerators vs flat screen tv or Wii)
- Participants want resorts to have access to bike trails (Alexandria or Bemidji)

- There is concern about accessibility of resorts for older clientele
- Coordinated ad campaigns among resorts may help identify location and availability
- Suggestion for coordinated web site advertising availability and locations
- Resorts appear to be least wanted by young adults (only fishing/bugs/nothing to do)
- Concern that resorts don't have capacity to serve broad clientele
- Other activities like geocaching and environmental education (Wolf Ridge Environmental Learning Center)
- There is some interest in returning to older ways—"like grandpa and grandma"
- People do travel the world and are quick to make comparisons with their various travel experiences
- The importance of a "good deal" is very important motivator for additional travel
- The location is still the most important decision factor. Once location is determined, additional deals sought

Suggestions

- The Minnesota resort industry may want to consider ways in which information about resorts, their locations, and availability is communicated to the public
- The Minnesota resort industry may need to complete further niche marketing research to help supplement current markets (eg. Seniors; gay/lesbian, special interest)
- The Minnesota resort industry may want to consider ways in which they can enhance the natural and environmental amenities of resort properties
- The Minnesota resort industry may want to consider ways in which resorts can further collaborate to maintain market share within the increasingly global travel industry

Appendix 1

Focus Group Participant Screener

https://spreadsheets.google.com/a/umn.edu/viewform?hl=en&AuthEventSource=SSO&formkey=dDIJSzktWINpWnc2MUFINUFCSkZacVE6MA . NAME (CHECK SPELLING):			
ADDRESS:			
CITY:		ZIP:	
PHONE:			
ALT PHONE:			
E-MAIL:			
GENDER: MALE...1 FEMALE...2			
INTERVIEWER		DATE	SUP
Letter sent:	On grid:	Rem #1:	Rem #2:

ASK FOR LISTED PERSON

INTRO: Hello, my name is _____ and I am calling from CJ Olson Market Research in Minneapolis, because we are recruiting individuals to participate in a focus group discussion for a research study concerning recreational activities. This is not a sales call and at no time will anyone attempt to sell you anything. If you qualify and participate in the discussion group, you will receive \$100 as a thank-you.

A. Do you have a minute to answer a few questions? (CIRCLE CODE)

YES..... 1 (CONTINUE)

NO, RESCHEDULE 2 DATE: _____
TIME: _____

REFUSED 3 (THANK AND TERMINATE)

1. Have you participated in a focus group or other research study in the past six months? (CIRCLE CODE)

YES..... 1 (THANK AND TERMINATE)

NO..... 2 (CONTINUE)

2. Do you or any of your immediate family members work in...? (CIRCLE CODE)

YES NO

Market research12 ..

Marketing12 ..

Advertising12 ..

IF YES TO ANY IN Q2, THANK AND TERMINATE

3. Have you taken a vacation away from home in the last 12 months, or not? This could be anywhere from a long weekend to a week or more away. (CIRCLE CODE)

YES..... 1 (CONTINUE)

NO..... 2 (THANK AND TERMINATE)

4. With whom did you take your vacation? Was it...? (READ & CIRCLE CODES)

Friends 1*

Spouse or partner only 2

Family..... 3

***IF ONLY FRIENDS, THANK AND TERMINATE**

5. I am going to read to you a list of recreational activities. I'd like you to indicate, with a Yes or No answer, which of these you participated in while on vacation in the past year. (READ, CIRCLE CODES)

	<u>YES</u>	<u>NO</u>
a. Boating	..... 1.....	.....2
b. Swimming	..... 1.....	.....2
c. Water skiing	..... 1.....	.....2
d. Riding all-terrain vehicles	..... 1.....	.....2
e. Vehicle camping	..... 1.....	.....2
f. Backpack camping	..... 1.....	.....2

- g. Horseback riding 1.....2
- h. Golfing 1.....2
- i. Hiking 1.....2
- j. Bicycling 1.....2
- k. Tennis 1.....2
- l. Fishing or hunting 1.....2
- m. Snow skiing 1.....2

6. For any of the vacations you took in the last 12 months, did you stay at a resort in Minnesota? (CIRCLE CODE)

YES..... 1 (CONTINUE)

NO..... 2 (SKIP TO Q8)

7. Can you tell what size resort you stayed at? Was it...? (READ & CIRCLE CODE)

A small resort, maybe a mom and pop type of place with 5-20 cabins 1

A medium-size resort, which could include cabins, a lodge or have hotel-type lodging with 50-75 room capacity and may have a pool, game rooms, and possibly a restaurant 2

A large resort that has a lodging capacity of 100-200 rooms, and has sports facilities as well as other amenities, like a spa, shopping, and supervised children's activities

8. May I ask if your age is...? (READ & CIRCLE CODE)

- 18-29 1
- 30-39 2
- 40-49 3
- 50-59 4
- 60 or better 5
- REFUSED 9

	RESORT – YES TO Q6		NO RESORT – NO TO Q6	
	GROUP 1	GROUP 2	GROUP 3	GROUP 4
DATE:	DEC 1	DEC 1	DEC 3	DEC 3
TIME:	11:00 am	4:00 pm	11:00 am	5:00 pm
LOCATION:				
<p>Focus group lab in the School of Journalism, University of Minnesota-- Minneapolis Campus</p>				

Thank you. The group will be approximately 1.5 hours in length. You will be paid \$100 for your time. The group will be held at _____. Someone will call the day before the group with a brief reminder call. If you usually wear glasses for reading or watching TV, please bring them along.

We would like to send you a letter confirming your attendance and providing you with a map and instructions on how to get to the location of the group. May I have your name and address?

RECORD ALL INFORMATION ON THE FRONT PAGE. BE SURE TO VERIFY ALL NAMES AND ADDRESSES FOR CORRECT SPELLING.

Appendix 2

Description of Resort Focus Groups

Group 1: Participants WITH Minnesota resort experience

- Gender: 7 women & 5 men
- Age: split
- Vacation with: family & Friends
- Resort size: split between small-medium-large
- Favorite activities: boating/swimming/hiking
- Most memorable vacation: Europe/NYC/Cruise/Paris

Group 2: Participants WITH Minnesota resort experience

- Gender: 6 women & 5 men
- Age: Majority in 40-49 group
- Vacation with: Majority with family
- Resort size: majority-- large (7)
- Favorite activities: hiking/getaway/swim/bike
- Most memorable vacation: Turkey/Hilton Head/ Cruise/Mackinac Island

Group 3: Participants with NO Minnesota resort experience

- Gender: 5 women & 6 men
- Age: Majority in 50+
- Vacation with: majority with Family
- Favorable activities: Boating/swimming/family reunions

- Most memorable vacation: Cruise/London/Boulder Colorado

Group 4: Participants with NO Minnesota resort experience

- Gender: 8 women & 4 men
- Age: Majority in 30-39 group
- Vacation with: Majority with family
- Favorite activities: Swimming/boating/hiking
- Most memorable vacation: Arizona/Alaska/Las Vegas/Spain

Appendix 3

Focus Group Questions

Opening Questions:

Q1. As part of our introductions, there are some note cards in front of you. Think about previous vacations you have taken. Jot down 3 vacation experiences you consider memorable. You define what “vacation” and “memorable” means. Now, I would like you to do 2 additional things. First, jot down a ballpark figure of the cost of those experiences. Secondly, pick one of the 3---this will be the most memorable of the three. Please give us your name, where you live, and your most memorable vacation experience

Key questions:

Q2. We are interested in the process you use to make vacation decisions. As you think about “going on vacation”:

- 2a. Who initiates the discussion?
- 2b. Who decides?
- 2c. If there are children or other family members, what role do they play in the decision?
- 2d. What information tools or sources do you use?
- 2e. How much lead time do you allow for researching/booking the vacation?

Q3. Perhaps you have taken your planned vacation(s) for a season or a year. However, something else comes up that encourages you to travel and take that extra trip. What might that “something else” be?

(probes: family celebration; festival/event, discount package, business-pleasure combo)

Transition question:

Q4. While on vacation, you have a variety of lodging options (resort/hotel-motel/B & B/VHR/campgrounds/VFR). What factors determine the type of lodging you choose while on vacation?

Q5. What types of incentives would encourage you to choose one type of lodging over another?

(probes: room upgrade/3 nights for price of 2/event coupons & discounts/spa/free golf/repeat guest priveleges

Key Questions:

Q6. One of the common characteristics of this focus group is that you all have/have not had previous experience at a Minnesota resort. How would you describe your experience or your perceptions of that experience?

Q7. You have a short survey related to a resort stay in front of you. Please take a couple of minutes to complete this survey and then we will talk about a couple of the items.

7a. What about marketing messages? How do you prefer to receive them?

7b. What is a price point that provides a good value?

Q 8. As you think about Minnesota resorts in general, what is your overall perception or image of Minnesota resorts and the Minnesota resort industry?

Q9. What do you consider the barriers for taking a resort vacation?

Closing questions:

Q 10.How has the current recession impacted your vacation/travel plans over the past 2 years?

10a. Type of vacation?

10b. Amount budgeted for vacation?

10c. Length/distance/type of vacation?

Q11. As we come to the end of the discussion, I would like you to look into your crystal ball. What do you think the future of Minnesota resorts and resort vacations will be the next 5-10 years?

Q12. Are there any other comments you would like to make about your vacation plans and/or Minnesota resorts?

Appendix 4

Characteristics of a resort stay

1. How important are factors related to guest rooms:

	Very important	Important	Somewhat important	Not important
Quality of fixtures and finishes	7	16	12	3
Landscaping, setting, enviro	23	17	4	-
Security, quietness	29	16	5	-
Proximity to other facilities	16	19	11	-
Free internet	8	8	6	19
Cable tv	10	6	13	12

2. What daily per person rate (adults) do you feel is a good value for a resort, meals, and activities?

\$0-\$99_18_ \$100-\$199_25_ \$200-299_4_ \$300-399_- \$400-499_-
_ \$500+_-

3. How do you like to receive marketing messages?

Mail_48_
Internet_24_
Print ads_11_
Phone_4_
Expedia, etc)_11_
Other:_____

4 How do you like to make reservations?.

In person_9_
Over the phone_35_
Email_11_
Other internet provider (Travelocity,
Mail_-

5. What packages would encourage you to take a weekend trip?

Birthday_15____ Anniversary_20____ Special theme weekend_14____ Special interest_28____ Golf/tennis
_9____ Spa_7____

(OVER)

6. If you have stayed at a resort for a business meeting/conference, what do you think is the most important factor for choosing the facility:

Price_16____ Drive time_8____ Meeting facility amenities_5____ Resort amenities_17____ Familiarity_3____ New
/different_1____

7. What outstate Minnesota areas have you attended business meetings/conferences: (check all that apply)

Duluth_16____ Brainerd Lakes_9____ Mille Lacs_9____ Alexandria_4____ Detroit Lakes_4____
Bemidji_3____ Moorhead_3____ Willmar_1____